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Here, I will write about my own experience at Tohoku University as a French double degree student from École centrale de Lyon. I am half Japanese. As I am writing this (2023/03/25), I just finished my first year of master's degree in the GSIS graduate school.



Fuji-san

Do you think the program and the educational environment helped promote your research?

With the double degree program, there is no distinction between me and the other foreign students doing a master's degree. Unlike what I experienced in France, here, research is much more important than courses. I had to take only 9 courses (each for 1.5 hours per week for 4 months) for the 2 years of master and I completed them in 1 year. They were easy to complete compared to Centrale Lyon, and they did not take much time, so I had plenty of time to do my own research in my lab. Personally, these courses did not help me much for my research, so I had to learn everything on my own for research. Each student belongs to a laboratory, and Tohoku university is very big, with many different departments, so each laboratory is quite different from each other. Therefore, the specific environment in which each student evolves highly depends on the lab they belong to. In my lab, they did

not teach the basics to the new students, so I learned on my own, which is what I prefer, but it might not be suitable for everyone. My lab's professors are very competent in their domain, so I can rely on them for research. My lab is well equipped so I can work in a good environment, and I can conduct the experiments I want. As my lab is mostly composed of foreign students, everyone can speak in English, which is helpful for research, but it is not the case in every lab. Overall, I am satisfied with the educational environment which I think promotes good research.

Suggestions and/or criticisms for space of improvement

In my opinion, as the research environment highly depends on the lab, it is difficult for a future student to know in advance whether the lab fits him/her well. Japanese students can visit the labs but not foreign students, and the labs' websites do not always contain comprehensive information, so it might be difficult for a foreigner to project himself in a lab. More comprehensive information on each lab for foreign students, and not only for Japanese students, would be helpful.

Living in Sendai : Experience and Advice

Tips for new arrivals. (e.g., food and traffic can be more expensive than the cost in France)



Food, especially vegetables and fruits, can be quite expensive in Japan compared to France. The Aobayama dormitory (UH Aobayama) where I live is quite isolated and a bit far from the city center (around 1 hour walk), so if you want to go shopping, you either need to ride a bicycle or take the subway which costs 250 yen for a one-way trip. There is still some konbini shops at Aobayama where you can buy bentos, but they can be a bit expensive (from 500 yen to 700 yen). In Sendai, you should expect hot and humid summer and cold and dry winter with snow. Personally, I find Aobayama dormitory very convenient to go the lab (10-15 min walk from my room to my desk at the lab), but your lab could be located at the Katahira campus in the city center (you should not expect your lab to be in your graduate school's building, which is what I first thought. Tohoku university is very big.). Aobayama is on top of a hill. It is a calm place surrounded by nature.



Aobayama Campus



Aobayama University House

What is the monthly cost of maintenance in Sendai beyond the dormitory?



Sendai city seen from Aobayama

Personally, including the dormitory cost, and excluding what I could spend for trips or restaurants, I can live with 650 euros per month (300 to 350 euros for dormitory including electricity, water, ...), but it really depends on how you spend money. If you travel or go out a lot, it can be much higher than that.

Preparation for essential items for maintenance prior to arrival: living accessories, manuals of various kinds, etc.

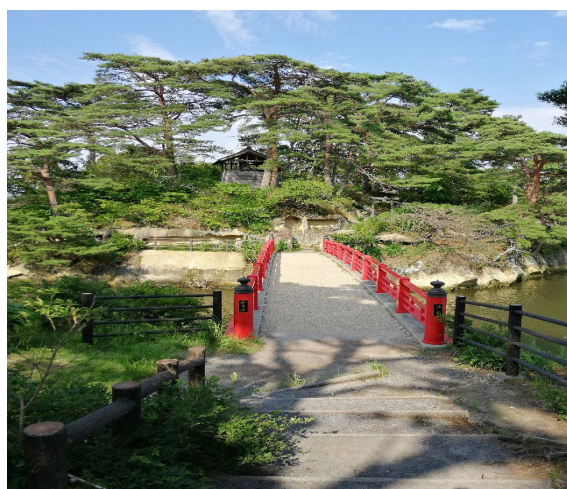
Aobayama dormitory already provides you with all the basic furniture (mattress, plates, forks, ...). You only need to bring basic furniture as when going on a holiday trip. You can buy everything you need when you arrive on site in the city center. You can buy the manuals on site.

Difficulties you may encounter after arriving in Japan. (e.g., shopping, hospitality)

You need to know some basic Japanese to be able to go shopping, traveling, reading signs, or other basic interactions. You must know that most Japanese people can't speak English. You might find some Japanese people a bit distant and difficult to talk with, but if you need any help and ask, they will always help you.

Leisure

There are many good restaurants and places to visit in Sendai and near Sendai. Shinkansen (bullet train) is the most common mean of transport for travelling long distances, but it is quite expensive (11000-12000 yen for Sendai-Tokyo). I find restaurants in Japan better and cheaper (usually between 800 and 2000 yen) than in Paris.



Career Paths

Pursuing graduate school degree (including PhD) at home university or Tohoku University

It is possible to continue to a PhD at Tohoku University after the master's degree. There is also a PhD program at both the home university at Centrale Lyon or INSA Lyon and Tohoku university under double tutoring. It consists of working half the time in Japan and the other half in France.

Professional career outside of academia

It is possible to work in Japan after the master's degree. However, from what I heard, the starting salary in Japan is quite low compared to France or other countries. It seems that experience and age is much more important in Japan, and they do not place much importance on your diploma (only based on what I heard and might depend on the field). Your status and salary start low and only go up with age, which contrasts with France and other countries. But there might be some international companies in Japan that do not necessary proceed in this way (I am not well informed on this matter though).



Ogawara Funaoka Castle Ruins Park